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DE RUEHAK #0299/01 0551505
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 241505Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2237
INFO RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 7042
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS ANKARA 000299

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958:N/A
TAGS: [CVIS](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [SCUL](#) [TU](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: No Foreseeable Relief For Iranian Domestic Woes

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: CONOFFs surveyed Iranian Immigrant Visa (IV) and Non-Immigrant Visa (NIV) applicants regarding the political, economic, and social conditions since the February 11 Revolution Day demonstrations. Applicants expressed mixed views about the effectiveness of the Iranian opposition movement. Some remain hopeful, but emphasize opposition success will take years, not months. Others said the movement is finished. Most Iranians voiced their continued anger over the outcome of last June's elections, but noted that many aspects of everyday life in Iran continue without government interference. A few applicants complained about increased government pressures since the unrest began to comply with strict Islamic social norms. A few applicants expressed optimism that Iran's economy is set to recover, giving no weight to opposition activities. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Most applicants thought the February 11 protests were much smaller than earlier protests. A Tehrani civil engineer said that he and his wife refrained from going out that day due to fear of getting injured or killed. He added the government's effective repression of the opposition indicates that any hopes for change may take years, not months. Most applicants did not go out in public during the February 11 protests and based on what they learned; believe that the impact of the opposition movement is greatly reduced. One Jewish IV applicant, who lives in a busy area of Tehran near the Ministry of Agriculture, said the Green Movement was finished. She has not seen any sign of the opposition since February 11. She added that she has never faced harassment nor heard of increased harassment towards the Jewish population due to the unrest.

¶3. (SBU) A Tehrani housewife reported that on February 11 protesters were dispersed among many streets in Tehran, but had come out in large numbers. She said that it was a combination of security forces preventing them from congregating in one area and effective media restrictions which made the protest appear weaker than it was. She noted soldiers in Tehran prevent groups of more than four persons from gathering. She added that tear-gas and electrified batons are also among security force's deterrents. She accounted how, although not involved in a protest three months ago, she attempted to help a young girl beaten brutally by security forces and was herself badly beaten. She emphasized that Tehran is now under a state of military rule. She said pressure by security forces to conform to Islamic social norms has been on the rise since the unrest began last June. Another Iranian said that Iran has always been under military dictatorship. An AMCIT accompanying her daughter on her IV interview said she was not harassed when she traveled to Iran this month, but had heard that the government is now using threats against people's bank assets to deter participation in the opposition.

¶4. (SBU) Overall the government of Iran (GOI) has been effective in reducing the expectations for success of the Green Movement. Since the February 11 protest, excitement for opposition success among applicants is significantly lower. At best some hoped that in two to three years the opposition might be successful. One applicant noted that the Islamic Revolution took many years to come to fruition. A dentist from Tehran said that the economic situation is poor country-wide. She added that outside of Tehran, in cities such

as Isfahan, which are more religious and secure, the opposition is more muted. She stated that people who have no business with the opposition are generally left alone, but those who show sympathy towards the opposition are heavily harassed. A Tehrani youth, accompanying his grandmother to her IV interview, remarked that the majority of Tehrani's spirits have been crushed. He added that no one in Tehran smiles in public anymore. In contrast, a Kermanshahi businessman's main concern was not the political unrest, but the amount of dust coming over the border from Iraq. He said that the dust is so bad that residents have to wear masks and sometimes have to close schools. He added that Iranians are still upset about the elections and the economy could be better, but in Kermanshah the only sign of the opposition is the graffiti which supporters spray-paint on walls under cover of night.

15. (SBU) Economic pressures remain a major concern mainly for Iran's youth. An elderly woman living in Karaj, a suburb of Tehran, said that people like her, who are well-established, continue to live comfortably or at least survive, but that the youth of Iran continue to struggle with Iran's ailing economy. An Isfahan University of Medical Sciences employee stated that although the world-wide recession has hurt everyone, it's the unprivileged youth of Iran who are suffering the most. He emphasized that established wealthy and middle-class Iranians are able to live comfortably despite the economic problems. He added that in Isfahan the Green Movement appears to have stopped, but added no one can predict the future.

16. (SBU) A few applicants, such as an older businessman from Rasht, reported no unrest in Northern Iran and had high hopes for Iran's economic future. Another couple from Gorgan, the capital Golestan Province, said there has been no political unrest there. A Bank Saderat Branch owner, whose brother was an Iran-Iraq War casualty, said the opposition movement was marginal. He admitted the current economic situation in Iran is poor with unemployment around 25%, but emphasized his belief that in a couple years the economy would boom. He attributed his hopes to heavy investments in massive building projects, including housing for Iran's growing population. He added that Europe, China, and Russia continue to do business with Iran despite the threat of sanctions. He added he hoped for improved relations with the U.S. as both countries would benefit economically. He was optimistic about the government's pending multistage subsidy reforms. He explained that the government wants to limit the amount of subsidies given depending on how much of each good a person uses. He said, for example, the government would subsidize 80% of the cost of a specific quantity of gas per consumer, but anything over that would be purchased at full price. He noted the main challenge is finding a realistic way to implement this, but was confident that once implemented, the system would be more equitable and improve the economy.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Applicant aspirations for regime change or even systematic reform have faded significantly since the February 11 protests. With the next demonstrations planned for "Chaharshanbe-Suri", a pre-Iranian New Year cultural festival, it is unclear how much impact the Green Movement still has, and whether it can continue to pursue successfully its past tactics of trying to pressure the regime through large public marches and protests. Most of our Iranian interlocutors believe not. As time passes, it appears that the GOI has grown increasingly more effective at countering the Green Movement's tactics and efforts, and confident that it now has the upper hand. On the other hand, accounts from visa applicants suggest that the regime is continuing to fail to find solutions to economic problems facing the unprivileged youth, a failure that will impact its long-term ability to control this population group. END COMMENT.

JEFFREY